

News from the Black Sea

Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation

Permanent International Secretariat (PERMIS)



Dear Readers,

We hope you all had a safe and healthy Covid-19 free summer 2020. We were hoping to publish the 13th issue of the *"News from the Black Sea"* without the difficulties created by the pandemic, but unfortunately it is still here and much of what we have to share with you is dominated by the virus.

Covid-19 is, without doubt, the first pandemic in a century to have such an extended and large-scale impact on the way we lead our lives and on sectors such as healthcare, trade, education, tourism, transport and many more. But we won't lose hope; one thing the Covid-19 crisis has shown is the urgent need for more cooperation and coordination among States. As the oldest and institutionally the most mature organization in the wider Black Sea region, at BSEC we carry on working closely with our Member States and every other regional entity that shares our common aims and objectives, those of cooperation, solidarity, dialogue and understanding.

It is in this spirit that I am happy and proud to announce the launching of our new website dedicated to the *Black Sea Virtual Knowledge Centre (BSVVC)* www.bsec-bsvkc.org whose aim is to improve knowledge and foster innovation within the Blue Economy – the sustainable growth of maritime resources – in the Black Sea basin.

You will be able to read more on this new initiative of BSEC PERMIS in the following pages of the Newsletter you hold in your hands.

In the meantime, Dear Readers, please #wear your mask #keep your social distance #wash your hands and #stay safe!

Ambassador Michael B. Christides
BSEC PERMIS Secretary General

LATEST UPDATES ON BSEC AREAS OF COOPERATION DURING COVID-19 PERIOD

Informal Meeting of the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs focuses on enhancing post COVID-19 cooperation: the need for innovative priorities of action.

The Romanian BSEC Chairmanship-in-Office hosted on the 25th of September 2020, the first ever online BSEC Meeting at Ministerial level: the *“Informal Meeting of the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the BSEC Member States”* (CMFA).

The Ministers had the opportunity to informally exchange views on the appropriate measures and innovative actions to be taken within the framework of BSEC in order to jointly respond to the adverse economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic in the wider Black Sea region. Several concrete proposals were put forward by the Ministers to coordinate efforts and exchange good practices in specific sectors of economic activity particularly affected by the pandemic. These include, inter alia, health, transport, trade, SME's, tourism and ICT, which fall within the framework of action of existing subsidiary organs of the Organization; the latter were encouraged to improve coordination and facilitate the post COVID-19 economic recovery in the region.

The Ministers also reiterated the importance of multilateral cooperation and the role of BSEC to serve as the platform for solidarity, enhanced cohesion, constructive and coordinated action among the Member States during this challenging period. The European Commissioner for Neighborhood and Enlargement H.E. Olivér Várhelyi was also invited to the meeting as a guest speaker. He gave a brief overview on the state of play in EU-BSEC relations and the desire to take this cooperation further.





On 25 June, like every other year, the BSEC “world” celebrated the *BSEC Day*, proud to confirm once again that the Organization has achieved a lot in its efforts to promote regional cooperation and economic development in the wider Black Sea area, as well as to establish a spirit of good neighborliness and understanding among its Member States and beyond.

Times have changed and the BSEC Organization, as every other active entity on the international scene, has to adapt to emerging and challenging circumstances and developments, not least of them the “new reality” imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Agriculture & Agro-Industry



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



The Government of the Republic of Turkey, as the donor country, the **UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)**, as the agency responsible for its implementation, and the BSEC PERMIS launched in June 2020 a project to establish the “**BSEC Regional Cooperation Centre for Sustainable Food Systems**”.

The project will contribute to more sustainable and inclusive growth in the countries of the region and will create awareness among the BSEC Member States on sustainable food systems, strengthening their collaboration and effective networking in the Black Sea area. The duration of the project is for three years with a budget of 500,000 USD. The beneficiaries of the project are the BSEC Member States and the wider BSEC Region.

Culture

Extending the BlueMed Project to the Black Sea

The first steps towards creating a network of Accessible Underwater Natural and Cultural Heritage Sites around the coast of the Black Sea have been taken by the Black Sea Economic Cooperation.

At a video meeting, hosted by BSEC PERMIS in Istanbul, representatives of ten Member States expressed their unanimous support for exploring an innovative new plan designed to protect, preserve and exhibit the unique underwater archaeological history of the Black Sea coastline.



Based on an extension of the EU-funded BlueMed Project in the Mediterranean, the long-term vision is to create a series of underwater heritage sites and 'Knowledge Awareness Centers' in several locations. These would exhibit to visitors detailed illustration on the history and ecology of the sites using the latest technology and 3D visualization techniques.

Energy



3rd edition of the International Conference on "Risk Management in Energy" (28 May 2020)

Participants at the Conference expressed the view that the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has significantly affected and destabilized the global oil and gas markets, undermined the energy security of many countries and had an enormous negative impact on the activities of the industry. High officials from Ministries of Energy, representatives of business communities and experts from research institutions gave presentations at the thematic session on *"Transition to a low-carbon economy – threats or new prospects for developing oil and gas production and processing?"* and participated in a panel discussion on *"Corporate strategies for risk management in transforming energy"*.

The BSEC PERMIS Secretary General, Ambassador Michael B. Christides, stressed that the Coronavirus outbreak has shown how vulnerable the Energy Market remains to similar global pandemics. He expressed the hope that the extraordinary slowdown in industrial production, in energy demand and in transport activity during recent months could reorient the economic policies of countries towards more sustainable development goals by facilitating the financing of more **green investments**, especially in BSEC Member States.

BSEC Urges Member States to Plant 75 Trees in 2020 to Support UN Initiative on Climate Change.

To coincide with the 75th Anniversary of the founding of the United Nations, BSEC PERMIS actively supports the initiative “75 UN – 75 trees UNAI SDG7”, designed to help raise awareness on issues of green energy, climate change and environmental protection. The overall goal of planting at least 1 million trees is directly connected to an appeal by the UN Secretary-General to governments and citizens around the world to increase their “ambition” in tackling climate change and to help re-forest the planet through concrete local actions. Eight BSEC Member States have already responded positively to this initiative.



SMEs



“E-COMMERCE ONLINE SEMINAR FOR SMEs FROM THE BLACK SEA REGION”

The “*E-commerce Online Seminar for SMEs from the Black Sea Region*” was held online on 21 September 2020, hosted by the *Global Rus Trade LLC (GRT)*.

The seminar was attended by more than 50 participants representing public and private sectors/business communities from BSEC Member States.

During the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic the importance and use of E-Commerce technology and platforms has increased enormously, given the various travel restrictions applied to contain the spread of the virus. The aim of the Seminar was to open the door to a more beneficial and effective use of E-Commerce technology, thus helping interested SMEs to acquire the necessary knowledge and capability in order to increase the radius of their activities, multiply their export capacity and reach into new, far-away markets.

During his welcoming speech the BSEC PERMIS Secretary General Ambassador Michael B. Christides expressed the hope that the outcome of the Seminar will complement and enhance the efforts undertaken so far by the BSEC Member States to increase the role of SMEs in their national economies and to boost trade cooperation among them and in the wider Black Sea region.

Tourism



Video-Meeting
Among High-level Dignitaries
FROM THE BSEC WORKING GROUP ON
COOPERATION IN TOURISM

(11 June 2020)



In light of the COVID-19 outbreak, the **BSEC PERMIS**, in consultation with the **Romanian BSEC Chairmanship** and the **Republic of Turkey** (coordinating country of the Working Group on Tourism), with the expert support of the **UN World Tourism Organization**, hosted the first video-meeting among high-level dignitaries from the above BSEC Working Group, on 11 June 2020.

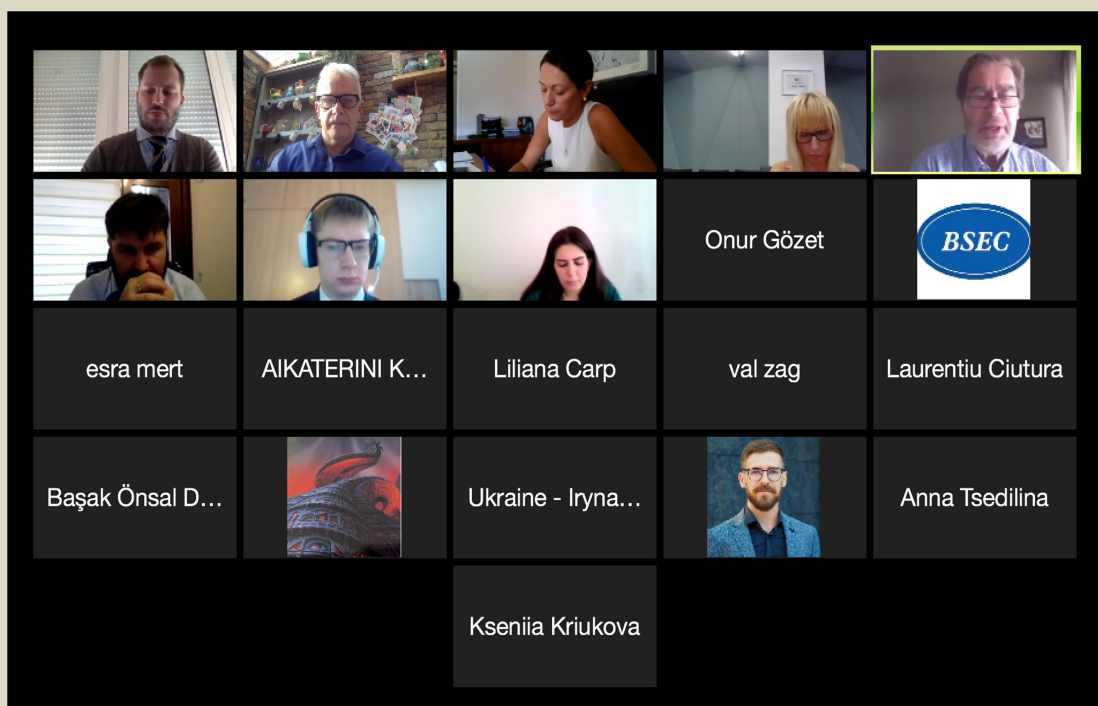
The discussions focused on the COVID-19 pandemic and its dire impact on the Travel and Tourism industry of all Member States. Participants exchanged information on the relevant measures adopted by each country and on the requirements that the post-pandemic era of the “*New Normality*” will bring, the main objective being to facilitate the safe and gradual reopening of Tourism among the BSEC Member States.

The UNWTO representatives briefed on the new action plan of the Organization, focusing on “*Priorities for Tourism Recovery*” and informed on the recently released UNWTO report on “*Global Guidelines to Restart Tourism*”, which outlines the priorities and a possible roadmap for the sector in the coming challenging period. In addition, they elaborated on the presentation entitled “*Travelling in the New Normal*” and encouraged participants to continue their efforts for the possible formulation of “*Potential BSEC Coronavirus Protocols*”, which could facilitate tourism flows in the region. The BSEC representatives agreed to pursue this objective during a next meeting organized and hosted by BSEC PERMIS.

Indeed and as a follow up, a second online meeting of the ad hoc Working Group on “BSEC Coronavirus Protocols” in Tourism was hosted by PERMIS on September 28, 2020.

Representatives from 8 participating BSEC Member States acknowledged that the recent resurgence of infection cases calls for greater cooperation and coordination among them, in order to find ways to support the Tourism industry and help it recover; even more so, as it contributes greatly to the region’s GDP and is closely connected to many other sectors of their national economies. Participants unanimously supported the creation of an *online information platform* covering the latest regulations and measures adopted by each country in the context of traveling under the “new Tourism norm”.

The UNWTO representative also addressed the meeting, confirming UNWTO’s support in promoting the new BSEC cooperation platform, and provided useful advice and guidance to that effect.



Trade & Economic Development



Steering Committee of the Black Sea Project Promotion Facility (BSPPF)

The Annual Meeting of the Steering Committee of the *Black Sea Project Promotion Facility* (BSPPF) was held on the 19th of June 2020, this time online, given the persisting difficulties created by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Representatives from the Donor side (Russian Federation), the BSEC PERMIS and the *Black Sea Trade and Development Bank* (BSTDB), as well as the BSPPF Manager took part in the event.

Participants engaged in an overview of the BSPPF's activities during the past year, looked into the results achieved so far through the completed projects and exchanged views on the expected outcome of the projects currently under implementation. The financial performance of the Facility as well as the respective reports was also reviewed during the meeting.

Although the recent pandemic has negatively affected the implementation process of some projects, attendees expressed their conviction that the interested beneficiaries will overcome the challenges and successfully complete the operations currently in progress.



BSEC PERMIS is happy to announce the unveiling of a new website dedicated to improving knowledge and fostering innovation within the Blue Economy – the sustainable growth of maritime resources – in the Black Sea basin.

The objective of the *Black Sea Virtual Knowledge Centre* (BSVVC) (www.bsec-bsvvc.org) is to provide a centralized platform for information on the Blue Economy in the Black Sea and to improve synergies between stakeholders and Blue Economy related projects in the region, while functioning as a stakeholders' platform.

The BSVVC is a project financed by the *European Maritime and Fisheries Fund* of the European Union and managed by the BSEC PERMIS for the duration of 24 months.

The objective of the BSVVC is to support a sustainable Blue Economy in the region by contributing to the implementation of the *Common Maritime Agenda for the Black Sea* (CMA).

The project will provide the means to disseminate information ensure synergies and raise awareness about opportunities in the Blue Economy sector. It also aims to support the work of the CMA Black Sea Steering Group, by providing regular updates on progress concerning the implementation of the CMA. The BSEC PERMIS will contribute to the establishment of complementarities and links with other relevant initiatives that are funded by the European Union, for example the Black Sea CONNECT CSA project related to the Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda for the Black Sea (SRIA) <http://connect2blacksea.org>

The BSVVC website will comprise all the information, news and events about the maritime economy and sustainable growth of the resources of the Black Sea in one place. It features information on funding opportunities for Blue Economy businesses and provides information for registering and sharing insights with fellow stakeholders. It will build on the "Facility for Blue Growth" and allow access to the activities of relevant BSEC Working Groups. An "Online Help Desk" within the site will allow users to ask questions, find information, get technical support and propose innovative ideas.

Transport



In light of the Covid-19 outbreak, the BSEC *Permanent International Secretariat* (PERMIS), in consultation with the **Romanian BSEC Chairmanship** and with the support of the *International Road Transport Union* (IRU) and of the *Union of the Road Transport Associations* in the BSEC Region (BSEC-URTA), organized an informal **video-meeting of the Steering Committee on Facilitation of Road Transport of Goods in the BSEC Region**, on 10 June 2020. Participants discussed urgent issues related to the negative impact of Covid-19 on the road transport of goods and exchanged views on possible short- and mid-term financial and non-financial measures for the economic recovery of the road transport industry.

40 experts from the respective Authorities responsible for Transport and Customs Matters from **Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Turkey and Ukraine**, as well as from the BSEC transport partner organizations **IRU** and **BSEC-URTA** took part in the event.

Other News



ICBSS - BSEC WEBINAR *Challenging post covid-19 era*

The *International Center for Black Sea Studies* (ICBSS), together with BSEC PERMIS, organized on 19 May 2020 an online discussion about regional cooperation and coordination after the Covid-19 outbreak and the role of international organizations in the post - pandemic era, focusing on the Black Sea Region.

The BSEC PERMIS Secretary General Ambassador Michael B. Christides emphasized the fact that the Coronavirus outbreak has dramatically exposed previously existing frictions and tensions around the globe and has also subjected multilateral cooperation to a new, severe test. He added that, despite the above, the COVID-19 crisis has shown the need for even more cooperation and coordination not only between States, but also within States, and underlined that the crisis has provided several lessons for how world leaders should approach other issues of a global scale, such as climate change and the implementation of the UN SDGs.



Cultural route
of the Council of Europe
Itinéraire culturel
du Conseil de l'Europe



Following a BSEC PERMIS initiative, the *Black Sea Universities Network* (**BSUN**) and the *European Institute of Cultural Routes* (**EICR**) signed a “*General Framework Agreement on Cooperation*” that, inter alia, opens opportunities for students from the Black Sea region to benefit from more courses, especially in what concerns the preservation of existing and the establishment of new Cultural Routes in Europe and the Black Sea Region. The Agreement, which was signed in August, will also open new internship opportunities for students from BSEC Member States at the *European Institute of Cultural Routes* as well as collaborative projects with the aim of integrating scientific research activities supporting “Cultural Routes”. BSUN has now become the 14th academic body to join the *University Network for Cultural Routes Studies*.

Visit of the Slovenian Ambassador of to the BSEC PERMIS headquarters

The BSEC PERMIS Secretary General, Ambassador Michael B. Christides, received on 22 September 2020 the Ambassador of the Republic of Slovenia accredited to the Republic of Turkey, H.E. Mr. Primož ŠELIGO, upon the latter's request.

Ambassador Christides informed his interlocutor on BSEC activities and plans for the immediate future.

The two Ambassadors agreed to focus their



attention on certain sectors like Transport, Environment, Tourism and ICT and confirmed their intention to continue constructive deliberations, aiming at mutually beneficial and concrete results in the near future.

The Republic of Slovenia is a Sectoral Dialogue Partner of BSEC.

CEI Ministerial Conference (24 September 2020)

The Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the *Central European Initiative* (CEI) gathered online to follow-up the efforts made since the last virtual meeting of their Heads of Governments on 15 May this year, to overcome the devastating impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic in the region. They exchanged views on the current situation and the measures taken so far.

Invited by the Montenegrin Presidency of the CEI, the BSEC PERMIS Secretary General, Ambassador Michael B. Christides, attended the online Conference and in his intervention, reiterated once again the need and urgency for more cooperation and coordination among States, especially now when, in order to combat the Covid-19 pandemic more effectively, we need to join together and streamline rules and strategies.



He added that regional organizations should intensify their coordination efforts in order to avoid overlapping activities and possible squandering of vital resources in fighting the pandemic. In line with the above, he reassured the Chairmanship and the participants of the Conference, that the BSEC Organization and its Member States are ready and eager to enhance focused cooperation with the *Central European Initiative* and with every other regional entity that shares the objectives, of regional cooperation, solidarity, dialogue and understanding.

15TH ANNIVERSARY UNITED NATIONS ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS (UNAOC) GROUP OF FRIENDS



Photo source UNAOC

“Shaping a Better World: Building Cohesive and Inclusive Societies in a Challenging COVID-19 Environment” was the theme of the Annual High-Level Meeting of the *United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) Group of Friends*, also marking the 15th Anniversary of the Alliance, held virtually in New York on 29 September 2020.

BSEC PERMIS was represented at the meeting by First Deputy Secretary General, Ambassador Mrs. Ebru Barutçu Gökdenizler. In her intervention at the online meeting, the First Deputy Secretary General reiterated BSEC’s commitment to the shared values and objectives of the UNAOC as outlined in the MoU concluded between BSEC and the UNAOC in 2016. She also underscored that BSEC, as a reliable and active member of the Group of Friends, would continue to promote the cause and activities of the Alliance in the pursuit of intercultural dialogue and understanding.

The First Deputy Secretary General further expressed BSEC’s keen desire to explore avenues of closer cooperation with the UNAOC through concrete projects and joint initiatives in order to better promote respect for a culture of diversity and religious pluralism. Ambassador Barutçu Gökdenizler stated that the wider Black Sea region was well disposed to place its assets channeled through the BSEC Organization at the service of shared goals and common efforts in order to build more bridges between cultures and civilizations.



The “*Third Meeting of the Steering Group of the Common Maritime Agenda (CMA) for the Black Sea*”, was held online on 9 October 2020.

The Meeting was chaired by the Republic of Bulgaria (Ministry of Transport, Information Technology and Communications) in its capacity as the Coordinator of this group. Around 60 participants from the wider Black Sea area and beyond participated in the meeting and discussed further steps to be taken on the implementation of the CMA.

Among the subjects discussed and presented during the Meeting were (a) the impact of the Covid-19 outbreak on key sectors of Blue Economy in the Black Sea region, (b) a project concerning the feasibility study on a concept for monitoring and management of maritime traffic (STM- Sea Traffic Management), as well as (c) the “*Black Sea Virtual Knowledge Centre*” (BSVVC), which is a new platform run by the BSEC PERMIS, containing information and data-sharing on Blue Economy-related projects in the Black Sea region.

Workshop for Young Diplomats



“Sustainable Development in the Black Sea Region” was the theme of the 3rd Edition of the Workshop for Young Diplomats from BSEC Member States, jointly organized online by BSEC and the *Konrad Adenauer Stiftung Turkey (KAS)*, on 12 October 2020.

It was very encouraging to host in the Workshop eighteen young diplomats from eleven BSEC Member States, all of them newly recruited and with limited experience in their respective Ministries of Foreign Affairs.

The main subjects of the Workshop were related to the sustainable development in the Black Sea region and covered some of the most important sectors of the economies of BSEC Member States, like energy (environment, alternative sources of energy, climate change, etc.); intelligent transport systems (transports, trade, globalized economy); and Blue Growth (focusing also on the presence of the World Bank in the region).

This 3rd Edition was the first online Workshop; while we believe that the real value of the event lies in bringing together the young participants and offering them the opportunity to liaise, discuss and exchange views in person, the BSEC PERMIS nevertheless decided to hold it online, in order to maintain the momentum of this valuable initiative and to acquaint participants and organizers with the “new normal” brought upon everybody by the Covid-19 pandemic. It was generally acknowledged that in order to confront and successfully manage the challenges created by the pandemic, international and regional cooperation are perhaps more indispensable today than ever before.

In that sense, all young participants expressed their appreciation to the organizers of the event and thanked the distinguished speakers and moderators for their beneficial contribution.

SOME MAJOR UPCOMING EVENTS:

- Meeting of the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the BSEC Member States (November 2020 to be confirmed)
- Meeting of the Ministers of Transport of the BSEC Member States (November 2020 to be confirmed)
- Meeting of the WG on Cooperation in Emergency Assistance (27 October 2020)
- Meeting of the WG on Energy (Mid-November 2020 to be confirmed)
- Meeting of the WG on Transport (November 2020 to be confirmed)
- Conference on Research and Innovation in the Black Sea: Empowering the next generation for a healthy, resilient and productive Black Sea (29-30 October 2020)
- CMA Annual Stakeholders Conference and Ministerial meeting (27-30 November 2020)



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